

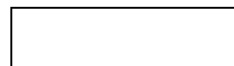
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Rwanda-Burundi: Rising Tensions

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Rwanda-Burundi

Rising Tensions []

Rwanda's allegations of Burundian support for the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), which invaded the country last October, and Burundian claims that Rwandans are inciting ethnic hatred are souring bilateral relations and raising fears of a resurgence of ethnic violence in Burundi. Kigali is challenging Bujumbura's professed neutrality toward the Rwandan conflict by highlighting the Burundian Tutsi-led regime's ethnic ties to the RPF—a Tutsi-dominated group. The RPF is demanding the ouster of Rwandan President Habyarimana, a Hutu, and the repatriation of nearly 500,000 Tutsi refugees. [], inflammatory press and radio broadcasts in Rwanda accuse Burundi of providing financial and political support to the RPF. In addition, the Rwandan Embassy in Bujumbura circulated a note in late May claiming that prominent Burundian officials had met last year in Germany with Rwandan Tutsi refugees to discuss the restoration of Tutsi rule in Rwanda. []

A Complicated Ethnic Equation

Bloody clashes throughout Rwanda and Burundi between the numerically superior Hutus and the traditionally ascendant Tutsis between the late 1950s and the early 1970s led to large-scale movements of refugees. The minority Tutsi rule in Burundi, while the Hutus have held power in Rwanda since ousting the Tutsis shortly after independence in 1962. Claiming limited resources, Kigali has rebuffed attempts at wholesale repatriation of its refugees, who often serve to channel ethnic unrest across borders. Some 225,000 Rwandan refugees—mostly Tutsis—live in Uganda and were the pool from which most of the Rwandan Patriotic Front guerrillas were drawn. Another 250,000, mostly Rwandan Tutsis are in Burundi, with smaller populations in Tanzania and Zaire. []

Burundi has flatly denied Rwanda's accusations and has countered with reports citing Rwandan activities in border provinces that have rekindled fears of ethnic conflict. Bujumbura claims to have caught several Rwandans illegally crossing into Burundi with forged identity cards and stirring up anti-Tutsi sentiments among Burundian Hutus, [] Moreover, in late July, Burundian security officials

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arrested an alleged Rwandan infiltrator and several members of Palipehutu—the Hutu People's Liberation Party, an illegal but influential party in Burundi—who were distributing anti-Tutsi pamphlets and cassettes in a province near the Rwandan border. The arrests have renewed fears of an outbreak of ethnic violence in Burundi; in 1988 groups of Hutus, allegedly prompted by Hutu infiltrators from Rwanda, killed hundreds of Tutsis and sparked a week of large-scale tribal massacres—some 20,000 were killed and 60,000 fled to neighboring Rwanda—before the Army could restore order. ☐

Although representatives of the two governments have met recently to address grievances, they have failed to reduce tensions. Burundi has threatened to expel Rwandan diplomats suspected of collaborating with illegal Burundian opposition groups, canceled military leaves, and tightened security measures at border checkpoints. Rwanda, in turn, has put its troops along the border with Burundi on semialert. Although

neither country is likely to risk a break in relations, dim prospects for a solution to the conflict in Rwanda portend continued friction between them and jeopardize progress toward a regional agreement on the repatriation and resettlement of Tutsi refugees. ☐

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